

Hands-on training boosts students' retention

Four tips to improve the quality of recertification training

Did you ever sponsor a recertification program, and afterwards wonder what, if anything, did the students learn? True, the lecturers proved knowledgeable and the information useful, but did anyone walk away understanding how to apply what they had heard?

Although WSDA's recent recertification survey (see page 20) indicates licensees in general are satisfied with the program, many would like to see more practical, hands-on programs. Incorporating hands-on techniques into a recertification training is not only easy, but information conveyed this way results in greater audience retention.

Adult educators estimate that when adults practice what is being taught, they retain 75 percent of the information. Compare that figure to the 20 percent retention rate among adults who listen passively to an audiovisual presentation. In addition, research indicates that learner retention is greatly enhanced by using a combination of teaching methods.

Sponsors can take advantage of this research. After a 50-to-60 minute lecture, instruct the class to do a hands-on exercise and practice what they heard during the lecture. Consider these tips for organizing the hands-on component of your training:



Fig. 1. After a lecture on airblast sprayer calibration, students measured the time it takes a sprayer to travel 88 feet. They later used this data to calculate the gallons per minute (GPM) output.

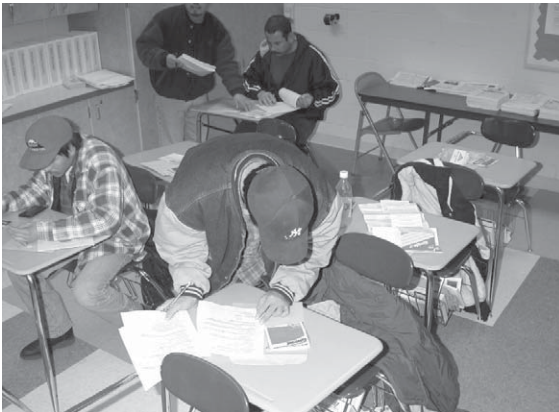


Fig. 2. Students take a quiz on pesticide labels and move through 30 stations to answer questions. Exercises that require participants to get up and move around can be especially useful for evening classes.



Fig. 3. During an on-site tour, students learn the role that ground covers play in weed suppression. The tour, led by WSDA Farmworker Education Specialist, Flor Tovar, took place at the Wenatchee Valley College experimental orchard.

TIP 1 – CHOOSE THE RIGHT SUBJECT

Some subjects lend themselves to hands-on training while others do not. Insect identification and calibration (Fig 1) are two areas ideally suited for a hands-on component. For more suggestions on suitable topics, contact Flor Tovar, Farmworker Education Specialist at (509) 662-0590.

TIP 2 – ENSURE TRAINING MATERIALS MATCH AUDIENCE

If your hands-on training component uses written materials, be sure to consider the participant's literacy level and cultural background. For example, if you offer recertification training to a group of Hispanic attendees, the handouts should be written in Spanish (Fig. 2). A hands-on activity can quickly lose effectiveness if training materials are long and complicated.

TIP 3 – GET THE BEST LOCATION FOR THE TRAINING

Sponsors often overlook the importance location plays in the success of their training. Often, sponsors select sites based on budget and accessibility criteria. However, getting the best location in town may be as simple as knowing the services a community offers for free. Learn about available resources by networking with other groups (Fig. 3). Finding the best location for a training program does not require a huge foundation grant. It will require the full participation of public and private partners, a clearly defined need, and the commitment to work together.

TIP 4 – PAY ATTENTION TO CLASS SIZE

As group size grows, the quality of hands-on training decreases. In large classes, participants cannot or will not get involved. Notice the difference between Figures 4 and 5. Try to limit the hands-on component of your training to no more than 12 people. If you have a larger group, include all members in the lecture portion of the training and then divide them into smaller groups for the hands-on activities.

Without a doubt, adding a hands-on component to your recertification or on-farm training program will require more pre-planning than a traditional classroom lecture. But the extra effort is well worth the time. Participants of hands-on training programs often rate them as the best classes ever attended.

Take the "hands-on" plunge at your next training program. When students walk away from this class, they'll be leaving with skills they can put to the test.

Taking the classroom to the student

Hands-on pesticide training builds partnerships, safer workforce

Two years ago, the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) introduced a hands-on training program for pesticide handlers. In that time, 250 people have attended the interactive workshops related to the proper handling of pesticides.

"The mobile classroom concept is an effective program, one worthy of being expanded statewide," said Phil Hull, Washington Growers League, whose organization sponsored three hands-on programs for a total of 120 trainees earlier in the year. "Hands-on training gives people invaluable skills and confidence; clearly, the employer benefits from a well-trained workforce and a safe work environment."

To meet the growing demand for hands-on training, the program's key organizers, WSDA and Washington State University Cooperative Extension, plan to offer more workshops where handlers live and work. In the training, pesticide workers learn through doing. Among other activities, handlers practice how to:

- control and clean up pesticide spills
- select proper safety equipment and clothing
- mix and load pesticide
- dispose of product

In addition to pesticide safety basics, future curriculum offerings include drift management and equipment calibration. The hands-on partnership also invites employers to attend training events and observe instruction firsthand.

WHY ISN'T THERE MORE HANDS-ON TRAINING?

In Washington, pesticide-handler training is required by law (see Worker Protection Standard, Chapter 16-233 WAC, at www.wa.gov/agr/pmd/docs/rcw/16-233.doc). Growers who hire Spanish-speaking workers sometimes find it difficult to meet the training requirement. Growers may lack Spanish-speaking skills or the resources to provide training in their employees' native language.

WSDA and WSU Cooperative Extension hope to make on-site training programs a widespread reality. Broadening the program, however, will mean enlisting the help of additional co-sponsors and bilingual volunteers.

"We're looking for people who can make a commitment to attend a daylong train-the-trainer course and teach one or more hands-on training programs in their own or neighboring counties," said Margaret Tucker, branch manager of WSDA's Certification & Training program.

A how-to guide for growers who wish to sponsor a training event is available through the Pesticide Management Division. In addition, WSDA and WSU Grant-Adams Cooperative Extension will provide technical assistance to any grower interested in conducting on-site training.

For information, contact Flor Tovar, (509) 662-0590, ftovar@agr.wa.gov or Ofelio Borges, (509) 225-2625, oborges@agr.wa.gov or Karen Lewis, (509) 760-2263, kmlewis@wsu.edu.



Fig. 4. When group size is small, all participants get involved and learn more.



Fig. 5. When group size is big, participants find it more difficult to get involved.

Editor's Note:

The hands-on training sessions are organized by WSDA and WSU Cooperative Extension with instruction provided by trainers in the tree fruit industry. Previous training programs have been co-sponsored by the Wenatchee Valley College, WSDA Farmworker Education Committee and the Columbia Basin Tree Fruit Society.